

Rutland, VT - Rep. Peter Welch visited Rutland's Open Door Mission today to press for federal action to combat homelessness among veterans in Vermont and across the country.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, one quarter of the 800,000 homeless Americans are veterans who live on the streets, in shelters, or in community based organizations. The *Rutland Herald* reported in mid-August that on a given week more than half of the Open Door Mission's boarders were veterans.

"These brave men and women have stepped forward and put their lives on the line to defend our country. Whether it is assuring they have healthcare, disability benefits, or housing, Vermont's veterans deserve our full support," said Welch.

Welch added, "The federal government must recognize homeless veterans face unique challenges relating to their service and demand unique solutions."

Christina Morgan, Director of the Dodge House, a transitional housing facility for veterans, said "I thank Congressman Welch for coming to Rutland to address the challenge of homelessness affecting too many of our veterans. Passing this legislation he has co-sponsored would be an important step towards providing more permanent and supportive housing services for Vermont's homeless veterans."

To address the issue, Welch has co-sponsored the Homes for Heroes Act, H.R. 3329, which tailors specific homelessness initiatives to the needs of veterans.

The Homes for Heroes Act would:

- Establish the position of Special Assistant for Veterans Affairs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to coordinate services for homeless veterans and serve as a liaison to the Department of Veterans Affairs, state and local officials, and nonprofit service organizations;
- Establish a \$200 million assistance program for supportive housing and services for

low-income veterans;

- Expand the highly successful HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program, authorizing 20,000 vouchers annually and making the program permanent;
- Authorize \$1 million in HUD grants to assist housing and service providers with the execution of their housing projects for veterans assisted by HUD, fulfilling the planning and application process, and assisting veterans in obtaining permanent housing or homeless assistance; and
- Require HUD to submit a comprehensive annual report to Congress on the housing needs of homeless veterans and the steps HUD has taken under the programs provided for in the bill.

In addition, the House has voted to increase funding for vouchers for homeless veterans and for the Grant and Per Diem program from \$92 million to its authorized level of \$130 million, which offers grants to public entities or private nonprofit organizations to provide services and transitional housing to homeless veterans.

It is estimated that nearly 400,000 veterans may experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year.